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MCF-Willow River “Stay with Unit” Plan

Minnesota Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell has directed each of the state’s prisons to implement “Stay with Unit” plans to provide living unit separation, and to minimize the potential for COVID-19 spread. “Stay with Unit” ensures incarcerated individuals participate in facility activities, including any programming, yard time, and dining, only with others in their living unit. By providing living unit separation, better social distancing becomes possible and we minimize the potential for widespread outbreaks across entire facilities.

The following additional measures have been taken to protect those within the Willow River facility. This list is not necessarily exhaustive of all measures in place.

Masks: N95s have been distributed to all staff at MCF-Willow River and are required to be worn while in the facility. All inmates have received cloth barrier masks, which are required to be worn.

Co-Pays: We have waived all medical co-pays for the duration of the Governor’s declared emergency to ensure no one is discouraged from seeking care.

Protecting Staff and their Families: MCF-Willow River has implemented a number of measures to protect staff and their families. Similar to staff at health care facilities, DOC staff have been provided guidance for steps to take to protect their families while they continue to come to work every day. Information has been distributed and is on posters at the facility for washing hands when they leave work, designating a door of their home just for them to enter and exit, changing clothes and showering when they get home, and avoiding sharing food, among other steps.

Hand washing stations: All individuals are required to wash their hands when entering and exiting the facility. MCF-Willow River has installed new hand washing stations in the facility. Handwashing sinks were installed in the lobby to the facility and other hand washing stations were installed in the barracks. Additional handwashing stations for inmates were placed in the facility’s main hallways, along with additional hand sanitizer receptacles installed throughout the facility. Inmate restrooms and kitchenettes also have sinks to wash hands. All individuals (staff and inmates) are encouraged to wash their hands frequently throughout the day.

Isolation Plans: MCF-Willow River has an isolation plan in place. Details include separating the symptomatic/confirmed individuals from general population and allowing personal hygiene activities, time outside, small written assignments, library materials, movies, and radio.

Isolation, quarantine, and cohort strategies were informed by recommendations from the Minnesota Department of Health. To properly follow these recommendations, MCF-Willow River utilizes cots throughout the isolation area to maximize separation and preserve cohort integrity.

Phones: MCF-Willow River Inmates now receive two free five-minute phone calls per week in addition to the standard calls they could already purchase. Phones are cleaned with germicidal by the user before and after each use and twice daily by work crews.

Video Visiting: Loved ones on the outside now receive one free 15-minute video visit per week. Additional video visits can also be purchased at a reduced rate, and hours have been expanded. Video Kiosks are cleaned with germicidal by the user before and after each use and twice daily by work crews.

Showers and Bathrooms: Inmates still have access to showers and bathroom facilities.

Recreation, Yard, and Courtyard Time: Outdoor recreation time is still occurring at all facilities. Certain no contact games are still allowed, as is playing catch, using exercise equipment, and lifting weights. Social distancing and disinfecting of equipment is monitored. Willow River continues outside activities, including physical training, drill and ceremony, and work crews. Procedures are in place to maximize social distancing. Equipment is cleaned with germicidal. This cleaning is monitored by staff.

Food Services: Willow River is providing meals by barracks and cleaning the dining hall between barracks' meal times. Social distancing is accomplished by seating at least 6 feet apart within the dining hall area.

Work: Willow River's work assignments are limited because of the nature of the program (not due to COVID).

Medication: Pill windows are open at Willow River. Social distancing is accomplished by minimizing the number of men in the line, requiring the use of a mask, and ensuring that they are 6 feet apart.

Mail and Emails: Inmates can still send and receive mail and emails as they normally would.

Canteen: Items purchased from the inmate store are still being delivered to the units.

Education: Distance learning plans are available. Education staff create packets specific to the inmate's needs that are delivered and collected weekly.

Treatment: Distance treatment programs are in development, and will be available soon. Distance treatment plans will look similar to the education plans.